

*J. Merrill*  
2173

THOUGHTS  
ON A  
PRE-EXISTENT STATE, *K*  
IN ANSWER TO A LATE  
DISQUISITION  
ON THAT SUBJECT.

Εἰς ἀναπόδεικτον γενόμενον. Mankind was born to be a riddle, and our nativity is in the dark; for men have taken the liberty to think what they please, and to say what they think; and they affirm many things, and can prove but few things; and take the sayings of men for the Oracles of God, and bold affirmatives for convincing arguments. Taylor's Preface to his Letter on Original Sin.

He, who has got hold of an hypothesis, how slight soever, is satisfied. He can presently answer every objection, and with a few terms of art give an account of every thing without trouble. *Ld. Shaftesbury's Moralists, Part I. Sect. I.*

C A M B R I D G E,

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M D C C L X X I I.

THOUGHT

THE

DISCUSSION



THE

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tions of an enemy equally demand confutation; for every rational believer must desire, not that a set of opinions, to which the name of Christianity is arbitrarily affixed, should be propagated in the world, but that the genuine doctrines of Christ and his Apostles, pure and unadulterated, should commend themselves to the consciences of men; as it is from them alone we can expect that solid piety and unaffected integrity, which it is the great object of revelation to establish.

I intend in the following treatise to consider only the third Disquisition, in which an attempt is made to establish the doctrine of a pre-existent state. I am very sensible of the disadvantage, I lie under, in opposing an author, whose brilliancy of wit  
and

and variety of humour must prejudice every reader in his favour: but on a subject like the present, I am willing to persuade myself, that truth, in it's plainest dress, may prove superior to wit, and the obvious importance of a right conception of things baffle the liveliest sallies of humour.

Our Author introduces the subject of a pre-existent state in the following manner: " That mankind  
 " had existed in some state previous  
 " to the present was the opinion of  
 " the wisest sages of the most remote antiquity. It was held by  
 " the Gymnosophists of Egypt, the  
 " \* Brachmans of India, the Magi of  
 " Persia,

\* If it had been material, he might have added, that the same opinion is retained by the Bramins to this day.

“ Persia, and the greatest Philoso-  
 “ phers of Greece and Rome: it was  
 “ likewise adopted by the fathers of  
 “ the Christian Church, and fre-  
 “ quently enforced by her primitive  
 “ writers; why it has been so little  
 “ noticed, so much overlooked ra-  
 “ ther than rejected, by the Divines  
 “ and Metaphysicians of latter ages,  
 “ I am at a loss to account for, as it  
 “ is undoubtedly confirmed by rea-  
 “ son, by all the appearances of na-  
 “ ture, and the doctrines of revela-  
 “ tion.” — Notwithstanding this  
 great display of authorities, the rea-  
 son, he assigns for his surprise, is  
 not, that he reposes with implicit  
 faith on the decisions of Gymnoso-  
 phists, Brachmans, Philosophers, and  
 Fathers; but that he is convinced,  
 the opinion itself is undoubtedly con-  
 firmed



firmed by reason, by all the appearances of nature, and the doctrines of revelation. If therefore it shall appear in the sequel, that this opinion is not confirmed by reason, by the appearances of nature, and the doctrines of revelation; modern Divines and Metaphysicians may perhaps continue to overlook it, though it has been formerly embraced by such venerable characters.

However, as it may be expected, that I should not dismiss such great personages without some notice; I will pay this small tribute to their worth. — The religious opinions of antiquity appear to have originated in the East. — From India they found their way to Egypt. — They consisted of a little truth, disguised in fable, and mixed with much error;

but the great care, that was taken to preserve them secret, gave them an air of solemnity, and stamped an imaginary value upon them in the opinion of the world at large. — Pythagoras, indefatigable in the pursuit of knowledge, was happy to obtain a participation of the Egyptian mysteries at any rate. To him the doctrine of a \* pre-existent state was indebted for it's popular reception in Greece and Italy. — Plato sought for information at the same source; and the splendor of his genius contributed not a little to cast a lustre upon the reputation of his instructors. — The Romans had little or no  
phi-

\* Though it was not absolutely unknown in Greece before the time of Pythagoras; it was the authority of that great man, which gave it it's firm establishment. — See Warburton's Divine Legation of Moses, Book 3.

philosophy, but what they retailed from the Greeks.

There cannot be a more pleasing or more improving employment, than to attend the sages of antiquity in their search after truth. The strength and weakness of the human mind will best appear, when it is unsupported by revelation, and little assisted by tradition. But we must not expect to learn the secret counsels of the Almighty from the conjectures of men, groping in impenetrable darkness. If such knowledge can be attained in our present state, it must be derived from the fountain of wisdom. Yet it was probably from the writings of these men, that such of the \* fathers of

\* See, in Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, in what veneration the writings of Plato were held in the first ages of Christianity.

of the Christian Church, as embraced the opinion of a pre-existent state, received their information.

Let us then for the present continue to overlook these great authorities, and proceed to try our cause by the united evidence of reason and revelation.

“In the first place,” says our author, “it is confirmed by reason; “which teaches us, that it is impossible, that the conjunction of a “male and female can create or “bring into being an immortal soul: “they may prepare a material habitation for it; but there must be an “immaterial pre-existent inhabitant “ready to take possession” — It was hardly to be expected in the present advanced state of philosophy, that we should be presented with an hypothesis



pothesis founded on our \* ignorance. Our author, to be consistent, should have stood forth boldly, and, embracing the doctrine of the Metempsychosis in its full extent, have maintained with equal certainty the pre-existence of brutes; for his argument is quite as applicable to them, as to the human race. But when this difficulty is removed, is he

\* How much more philosophic was the great Mr. Locke, who prefixed the following sentences to his Essay concerning the Human Understanding!

“As thou knowest not what is the way of  
 “the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in  
 “the womb of her that is with child: even  
 “so thou knowest not the works of God,  
 “who maketh all things.” Eccl. xi. 5. —

“*Quam bellum est velle confiteri potius  
 “nescire quod nescias, quam ista effutientem  
 “nauseare, atque ipsum sibi displicere!*”

Cic. de Nat. Deor. lib. I.

he prepared to account for all the others, that yet remain? Can he shew the greater possibility of forming the habitation for this immortal soul, and of adapting it so admirably, in all its parts, to the various functions of its spiritual inhabitant? Can he tell, when the creation is completed? how the union is at last effected? Where does this inhabitant reside, till an habitation be prepared for it? Will he assert, with the Jewish Cabalists, that the souls of all men were in the body of Adam, and have been transmitted to succeeding generations by a natural process? Or has he some more ingenious method of accounting for what the rest of the world are ready to acknowledge themselves altogether ignorant of? — But there would be no end of  
 i  
 questions

questions of this kind: let us proceed to the second reason, which is as follows:

“ Reason assures us, that an immortal soul, which will exist eternally after the dissolution of the body, must have eternally existed before the formation of it: for whatever has no end, can never have had any beginning, but must exist in some manner, which bears no relation to time, *to us totally incomprehensible*: if therefore the soul will continue to exist in a future life, it must have existed in a former.” — The first thing, that must strike us, in reading this passage, is the inconsistency of it. We are told, that the soul exists in some manner, which bears no relation to time, to us totally incomprehensible: yet,

yet, in the next sentence we comprehend it so clearly, as to be able to draw with certainty the following conclusion from it, that, if the soul will continue to exist in a future life, it must have existed in a former. Exclusive of this inconsistency, the passage appears to be nothing more, than taking the question for granted; for it is at least as easy to conceive, that a being may first exist in time, and afterwards in eternity, as that it should first exist in eternity, then in time, and finally in eternity.

The third reason, produced by our author, so much resembles what he has said on the appearances of nature, that I cannot but consider it as one argument.

He has exerted all the powers of  
his



his wit in drawing a minute comparison between this world and a prison, or house of correction. — “ It is,” says he, “ a spacious, beautiful and durable structure: it contains many various apartments, a few very comfortable; many tolerable, and some extremely wretched: it is inclosed with a fence so impassible, that none can surmount it but with the loss of life.” — Figurative language has great effect in embellishing an oratorical harangue, but it seldom contributes to the clearness of an argument. Let us examine the last sentence in plain English: To lose our life is to die, that is, to go out of this world, or, in our author’s words, to surmount the fence, with which this world is inclosed: stripped then of its figurative

tive dress, it runs thus: This world is inclosed with a fence so impassable, that none can surmount it without surmounting it. What things may not be made to resemble each other with such licence in the use of words?

I will, however, proceed to examine the idea itself of this world's being a place of punishment for sins committed in a pre-existent state.—The end, aimed at by this punishment, our author acknowledges to be reformation. Now in order to produce reformation by means of punishments, it is necessary, the delinquent should be sensible, that his sufferings are the consequences of his former crimes. He then may learn to detest, and abstain from, what he finds by experience to be productive of

of misery. Independent of this consideration, there seems to be little efficacy in pain to promote amendment. If therefore the souls of men were condemned spirits, exiled into human flesh, and doomed to continue in this state of purgatory, till they had expiated the crimes, they had formerly committed; can we suppose, they would have no sense of their former state, and no recollection of their former guilt? Would the Deity have interposed with his almighty power, to expunge all traces of it from their minds, and by that means prevent the salutary effects of the punishments he had inflicted? Indeed the very idea of punishment in such a case militates strongly, not only against the wisdom of God, but also against his justice:

justice: for the want of consciousness between two distinct parts of the existence of any being effectually destroys the identity of person; and the being, in the latter part of such existence, would be no more accountable for actions committed in its preceding state, which it could not appropriate to itself by consciousness, than it would be for the actions of any other being, that was utterly annihilated previous to its creation\*.

The opinion of Plato was not quite as inconsistent as our author's. † He maintained, that some traces of a former state remained in the mind. He allowed indeed, that the soul, by the transition from one state to the other,

\* See Locke's Essay. Book II. Chap. 27.

† Plat. Phæd. p. 55. & seq. fol. Francof. 1602.



other, for a time lost all remembrance of its former existence, and of the ideas it had acquired in it; but that afterwards it was gradually enabled to recollect them, as favourable circumstances happened to occur, to assist it in its operations. Hence, learning was nothing more than recollection; and the great business of an instructor was to frame such apposite questions, as would recall to the mind of the pupil what he already knew \* — This account may have passed very plausibly in the time of Plato; but it is no longer defensible, since Mr. Locke has deduced

\* This doctrine is put into the mouth of Socrates; but I am rather inclined to believe, it is one of those, embellishments shall I call them? borrowed from the Egyptian mythology, which Plato has worked up into the plain and simple philosophy of his master.

duced all our ideas from sensation and reflection.

But setting all this aside, our author's description of the world is at least as applicable to a place of \* education, as to a prison or house of correction. If the founder of the dwelling appears to have made ample provision for the accommodation and

\* " A state of discipline must be neither  
 " a state of perfect happiness nor misery,  
 " but an interchangeable scene of very agree-  
 " able pleasures, and tolerable evils, suffi-  
 " ent to exercise the virtues, and to correct  
 " the vices of mankind : and this I take the  
 " state of this life to be ; so happy, that few  
 " men are so miserable, as to be weary of it ;  
 " and yet so intermixed with troubles, as to  
 " exercise the virtues of good men, and to  
 " correct the wicked : and this is what be-  
 " comes the goodness of God to do for us  
 " in a state of discipline." — Sherlock on  
 Providence, Chap. 7. p. 222. 4to. See this  
 whole Chapter.

and support of its inhabitants: if the majority of the inhabitants actually do enjoy those comforts; and they, who do not, are prevented not so much by the absolute appointment of the founder, as by the necessary imperfection of created things, and their own abuse of their most valuable privileges; there appears to be nothing in this description incompatible with a place of education or moral discipline, instituted for the sole purpose of preparing its inhabitants for the enjoyment of happiness in a future state.

Our author is very eloquent in describing the various miseries of human life. — It is surely more consistent with the wisdom, the justice, and the benevolence of the Deity to permit those evils, which could not

be prevented without introducing greater, and by wise regulations direct them as punishments for offences committed in this life, to check the progress of sinners, and to recall them to a sense of their duty; than to appoint them as instruments of expiating, we know not how, some unknown guilt, contracted we know not when. On the former supposition every thing is as clear as the day: we see the connexion between the sin and the punishment: we perceive the natural tendency of virtue to promote happiness, and of vice to produce misery. In the other hypothesis there is nothing but shadows, clouds, and darkness.

Again; it seems to me quite as conceivable, that man, short-sighted in his understanding, and without  
moral



moral propensities, but placed in this state of discipline in order to acquire them, should, in the course of that discipline, deviate from the line of his duty; as that a spiritual being, inhabiting eternity, should fall from a state of perfection, in which it was originally formed.

It will be necessary to consider these several topics more particularly.

The production of all possible happiness is implied in the very idea of the infinite benevolence of the Deity. The creation, therefore, of the most imperfect beings is consistent with the divine benevolence; provided their existence is better than nothing, and they are no impediment to more perfect orders. If the universe be fully supplied with

purely spiritual beings, it is agreeable to the divine goodness to create others compounded of spirit and a material substance. If this union of spirit and matter be preserved, and rendered effective, by some particular organization of the latter; whatever tends to alter that organization, tends to dissolve the union or to prevent their co-operation. Now as long as we admit motion, material substances must be subject to composition and dissolution, which will alter the organization, and by that means tend to destroy this union, of spirit and matter, or at least to obstruct their mutual influences. On this account it becomes the wisdom and goodness of God to give the spiritual percipient part notice of this danger, by gentler or more acute pains,

pains, that the union may be prolonged, and preserved effective, by such methods, as the nature of things admits of. Hence, diseases and pain are necessary parts of such a system.\*

These compound beings will be of different orders : for our ideas of the benevolence of the Deity lead us to believe, that all the parts of the universe, unoccupied by superior orders, will be filled with inferior, till there be a regular gradation formed from the most perfect created beings to non entity. As the more independent a being is, and the more it has the principle of action in itself, the

\* This subject is discussed at large in ABp. King's Origin of Evil with Bp. Law's Notes : a book our author appears to be very well acquainted with, as may be seen by comparing his Disquisition on Time with Remark c on Note 10 in that work.

the more perfect it is; it follows, that the most perfect of such beings will be those, that are of a rational and moral nature, that is, have a freedom of will to propose to themselves certain ends to be attained, and reason to direct in the proper methods of attaining those ends. But the nature of free will implies a power of abusing it. Hence the most perfect of those beings must be conceived liable to act contrary to the laws of God; and of course, all the evils, which arise from the abuse of free will, are evils necessary to such a system. Nor is it any objection against the wisdom or benevolence of the Deity to have formed such a system, provided the advantages of it counterbalance the disadvantages.

Far-



Farther;\* we perceive in this world, that previous discipline is necessary to every state. In childhood we prepare ourselves for enjoying the pleasures, and performing the offices of manhood; and for every particular situation a particular education is requisite. Can we suppose then, that we need no discipline, no education, to enable us to perform the functions, and enjoy the blessings of eternity?† But general laws are best suited to the discipline of rational and free agents, as being absolutely necessary to produce a fixed principle of conduct. Effects must regularly follow their causes, both in the natural and moral world, in order to excite them to action, and to induce them  
to

\* See Butler's Analogy, Part I. Chap. V.

† See Craven's Sermons.

to persist in it; and also to preserve to them the exercise of their free will, which would be destroyed, if it were overawed by the continual and immediate interpositions of a superintending Providence. — The irregularities, therefore, which arise in such a system merely from the abuse of free will and the operation of general laws, can be no objection against the wisdom or benevolence of the Deity, or prove this world to be any other than a place of moral discipline or education.

But, it seems, like other malefactors, we enter this prison with malignant dispositions and unruly passions, which are afterwards gradually corrected by the severity of it's discipline. If this observation were founded in fact, it would be a  
 , serious

serious argument; particularly when joined with another, which our author makes afterwards, that we come into the world with a load of guilt. It is indeed hard to conceive, that a spiritual uncompounded being should commence it's existence with malignant dispositions and unruly passions; and, if possible, more difficult to comprehend, how any being can be loaded with guilt at it's first entrance into this life, if it had not existed in some previous state. " In all our  
 " researches into abstruse subjects,  
 " there is a certain clue," our author observes, " without which the fur-  
 " ther we proceed, the more we are  
 " bewildered, but which, being for-  
 " tunately discovered, leads us at  
 " once through the whole labyrinth,  
 " puts an end to our difficulties, and  
 " opens

“ opens a system perfectly clear, consistent, and intelligible.”—To obtain a clue for the present labyrinth, he has boldly soared on the wings of imagination into the trackless regions of eternity. Be ours the humbler task of consulting experience. The road, which she recommends to us, may, at a transient view, appear the most tedious; but wise men will always think that way the best, which conducts them with the greatest certainty to the object of their pursuit. The world has been too long amused with the clues, presented to it by fabricators of systems. No sooner is an investigator of nature bewildered by the variety of her operations, but he weaves himself a clue, to put an end to his difficulties at once. Wherever that leads, he follows with  
the



the blindest infatuation. Almost every phenomenon has been accounted for by a separate hypothesis, framed only for it's immediate object, and inconsistent with every other. But it is only from an accurate observation of the laws of nature, that we can collect a set of principles equal to the solution of all her appearances. Let us try, therefore, if we can apply this method, so successfully adopted in natural philosophy, to an analysis of the human mind.

There is implanted in every being a desire of happiness. It is not an accidental circumstance, but a part of it's nature. We cannot even conceive a sensitive being to be destitute of it. If we can with this principle alone account for the supposed malignant dispositions of children ; we shall

shall have as much reason to attribute them to that source, as \* Mr Locke had to attribute the origin of our ideas to sensation and reflection.

Let us then conceive a child born into the world with an instinctive desire of happiness, but totally void of moral propensities. Whatever tends to promote pleasure in him, will be an object of pursuit. The primary inlets to pleasure are the senses; but as our business at present is with the mind, and the pleasures of sight and hearing have the closest connection with that, we will confine our attention to them. — When the mind begins to act, the simplest kinds of pleasure are best suited to the feeble state of it's faculties. Now the simplest kind of pleasure, of which the  
mind

\* See Locke's Essay, Book I. Chap. II.

mind is capable, is that, which it receives from objects, that merely make a gentle impression upon it: in the next class must be ranked those things, which barely create a succession of ideas: after some time an uniform succession will not be sufficient to keep awake the attention; recourse must be had to variety, to enliven it. Thus the things, which communicate pleasure to infants through the sight, are, first, the mild and steady light of day; next the gently moving light of the flame of a candle, afterwards brisker motion, and then variety of motion. In like manner, the ear is pleased first with a soft sound, next with a louder sound, afterwards with a succession of sounds, and then with a variety in the succession. Whenever these

these effects are produced, whether by animate or inanimate objects, they will be attended with delight.

These propositions, I trust, will be sufficient to account for the pleasure, which children receive from torturing animals, without referring it to malignant dispositions acquired in a pre-existent state.

We suppose this the first state of the child's existence: we suppose him totally destitute of every moral quality, good or bad, and sensible only of an instinctive desire of happiness. Objects therefore can appear to him under no other point of view, than as they promote his happiness. Hence, the child is at first delighted with having a bird in a string, and observing it's simple motions; he then endeavours to make it utter  
some



some noise: his next attempt is to oblige it to accelerate it's motions and increase it's cries, till at last by a repetition of torments the sufferings and existence of the wretched animal are terminated together. \* —

And is not this an instance of a malignant disposition? By no means: it is only the necessary consequence of having no innate moral propensities at all. Is it nothing then to be insensible to the sufferings of others? Is it not morally evil to be void of sympathy? That must depend upon circumstances. It is no more morally evil in a young child to be void of sympathy, than to be without the strength of a man. He is such, as  
he

\* Rousseau has attempted an explanation of this in his *Emilius*; but I think, he has not succeeded.

he came from the hands of his creator, imperfect but not wicked, equally destitute of virtues and vices, but placed in a situation, in which he may acquire the one or the other; and the nature of those acquisitions, which must depend in a great measure upon himself, will constitute him either morally good or evil.

Let us now consider, whether, upon our former principle, sympathy can be produced in the mind of a child, who is naturally void of it. — There is a property of the mind, by which ideas, that have been often connected in it, “come to be so “united” (to use the words of Mr. Locke \*) “that it is very hard to separate them: they always keep in “company, and the one no sooner at  
“any

\* Locke’s Essay, Book II. Chap. XXXIII.

“any time comes into the understand-  
 “ing, but it’s associate appears with  
 “it; and if they are more than two,  
 “which are thus united, the whole  
 “gang, always inseparable, shew  
 “themselves together.” Let then  
 the happiness or misery of the ani-  
 mals, a child has in his power, be  
 constantly connected with his own,  
 and the ideas, gradually become in-  
 separable, will always enter the mind  
 together; that is, he will feel nearly  
 the same pleasing or uneasy sensa-  
 tions at the thought of the one, as  
 he would at the expectation of the  
 other; or in other words, he will  
 sympathize with them. By this me-  
 thod of treatment many a boy has  
 been known unaffectedly to grieve  
 at a disaster, that has befallen a cat  
 he has been taught to caress, who has

persecuted with unrelenting cruelty the rest of the species. The means of effecting this connexion of happiness are various; but the most common and obvious are exhortation, reproof, and correction.\* When  
the

\* A variety of proofs might be produced of the truth of what I have here laid down concerning the production of sympathy; but I think nothing more convincingly establishes it, than the partiality of it's operation. The sportsman, who feels exquisitely for an accident, that happens to his horse, is delighted with observing the doublings of the hare, and the artful tricks of the fox, and exults at their death. Whence can this proceed, but from what I have already observed, that association has connected an idea of his pleasures with the health and vigour of the horse, and the pursuit and death of animals of chase? Need I here mention the fair philosophers, who so far forget their usual sensibility, as to wage war against the whole race of butterflies, and behold without emotion the lingering



the mind has been long used to these associations, it acquires a wonderful facility of forming them upon the slightest foundations. An apparent † similarity of situation will often be  
suffi-

gering agonies of the gaudy victims of their scientific ostentation, whose only fault is, that they please too much?

† Revelation seems to me to contribute very much to the propagation of benevolent dispositions in the minds of men, by deriving the whole human race from one common parent, and by ascribing the creation and preservation of all nature to one God. The idea of local deities and *Αυτοχθόνες*, or original natives of particular countries, which prevailed so generally in the heathen world, must have weakened those dispositions in all, and utterly have destroyed them in some. This, probably, co-operating with Grecian vanity, induced the philosophic Aristotle himself to believe, that nature intended some men to be slaves.\* It is certainly on similar principles,  
that

\* Arist. de Rep. Lib. I. Cap. V.

sufficient for the purpose. A parent will feel in a peculiar manner for the sufferings of a parent. For the same reason,

that the present advocates for slavery defend that abominable traffick. They are not, say they, of the same nature with us. But do they feel no anxiety at being torn from parents, children, brothers, friends and country? Are they not sensible of hunger, and thirst, and pain, of the insolence and cruelty of a task-master? But what proofs are produced in support of this assertion? Why, they are revengeful and treacherous. What other dispositions, upon the principles I have laid down, can be formed in the minds of any human beings, who are forcibly detained in slavery, and oppressed without mercy? Yet even the sable tribes of Africa have furnished many instances of the most unshaken fidelity and the warmest attachment in slaves towards their masters; for they are not insensible to generous treatment, till the weight of their injuries has debased their moral as well as intellectual faculties:

Ἡμῖν γὰρ τ' ἀρετῆς ἀποαίνυται δόλιον ἡμᾶς.

reason, man sympathizes more heartily with human beings, than with other creatures: but highly cultivated minds compassionate the miseries of every animated being. All the other moral qualities of men, good and bad, Gratitude and Ingratitude, Justice and Injustice, Sincerity and Falshood, Temperance and Intemperance, are easily accounted for in the same manner, in which we have explained the production of sympathy, viz. by the instinctive desire of private happiness and association. It is contrary therefore to the first principles of philosophy to consider them as innate, or inherent in the soul prior to, or coëval with, it's entrance into this world; and can we conceive it existing in a

former state without any ideas or qualities intellectual or moral.

If I have satisfactorily proved from reason, that we do not come into this world with malignant dispositions; such, as are afterwards acquired, will fall very far short of a proof of a pre-existent state.

Our author, to conclude his argument, asserts, that “the opinion of  
 “ a pre-existent state is no less confirmed by revelation, than by reason and the appearances of things;  
 “ for although *perhaps* it is no where  
 “ in the New Testament explicitly  
 “ enforced, yet throughout the  
 “ whole tenour of those writings it  
 “ is every where implied.” Let us examine the New Testament, and judge for ourselves. The soul, according



cording to our author, is put into  
 the body, in order to purify it from  
 the guilt, it had contracted in a for-  
 mer state. Is it not singular, ac-  
 cording to this hypothesis, that in  
 the New Testament the guilty soul  
 or spirit is uniformly represented as  
 the source of virtue and piety, and  
 the body, the supposed instrument  
 of reformation, as the incentive to  
 vice and impiety; and that the con-  
 verts to Christianity are enjoined to  
 keep themselves unspotted from the  
 world? But the New Testament con-  
 tradicts our author's declaration, not  
 only by implication, but in the most  
 direct manner; it asserts the inno-  
 cence of children in the most un-  
 qualified terms, and proposes them  
 as objects of imitation: \* "Jesus  
 " called

\* Mat. xviii. 2, 3, 4. xix. 13, 14. Mark x.  
 14, 15.

“ called a little child unto him, and  
 “ set him in the midst of them, and  
 “ said, Verily I say unto you, except  
 “ ye be converted, and become as  
 “ little children, ye shall not enter  
 “ into the kingdom of heaven.  
 “ Whosoever therefore shall humble  
 “ himself as this little child, the same  
 “ is greatest in the kingdom of hea-  
 “ ven.” If it were possible for the  
 shadow of a doubt to remain about  
 the sense of scripture on this sub-  
 ject, the following words of St. Paul  
 must effectually remove it: \* “ and  
 “ not only this, but when Rebecca  
 “ also had conceived by one, even by  
 “ our father Isaac, (for the children  
 “ *being not yet born, neither having*  
 “ *done any good or evil*, that the pur-  
 “ pose of God according to election  
 “ might

\* Romans ix. 10, 11, 12.

“ might stand, not of works, but of  
 “ him that calleth) it was said unto  
 “ her, The elder shall serve the  
 “ younger.”

“ But,” says he, “ men are ex-  
 “ hortēd to work out their salvation,  
 “ not to prevent their condemnation,  
 “ for that is already past, and their  
 “ only hope now is in redemption.”  
 What ! does he not know, that these  
 exhortations were addressēd, not to  
 children, whose innocence and sim-  
 plicity, as I have just now shewn,  
 were proposēd as models of imitation,  
 but to men, who had corrupted their  
 ways before God ? He has doubtless  
 been led into these errors by mistak-  
 ing the meaning of the terms *origi-  
 nal sin* in the ninth article of the  
 Church of England. Sin, in the  
 common acceptation, implies the vi-  
 olation

olation of some divine law; but in the article, here referred to, its meaning is widely different; and it would perhaps be more agreeable to the present import of the words to call it *original* \* *imperfection*, by which man, as soon as he becomes a moral agent, if left intirely to his own guidance, will naturally incline to a violation of the laws of God. Whatever may be the nature of that imperfection, we certainly are not warranted by revelation to build upon it the doctrine of a pre-existent state; since the scriptures uniformly attribute the corrupt tendency of it to a transaction, which took place in this life.

Before I proceed to consider that  
part

\* Vide Limborch Theol. Christ. Lib. III. Cap. III. Parag. IV.



part of my subject, it will be proper to make an observation or two on the nature of my plan. — There are two methods of explaining the appearances and operations of nature, the analytic and the synthetic. The former, which consists in reasoning from known effects to their unknown causes, is deservedly preferred to the other, of reasoning from causes to their effects; as we may be much more certain of the truth of our premises in one case, than in the other; and we cannot always be sure, that different causes may not produce effects in many cases similar to each other. But when the premises are few, simple, and incontrovertible; the latter mode of reasoning carries no inconsiderable degree of weight with it; and that point will

will be looked upon as most satisfactorily made out, which admits of a proof in both these ways. In the preceding part of this treatise I have adopted the former of these methods, my design, besides invalidating our author's arguments in favour of a pre-existent state, being to prove this the first state of our existence, by tracing our intellectual \* ideas and moral dispositions to their origin, and shewing, that they have been all acquired in this life. The conclusion, I think, follows of course; for the supposition, that a rational and moral agent could have existed in a former state, and yet be totally void of

\* I have trusted to the reader's acquiescence in Mr. Locke's doctrine for the part of the proof, that depends upon the origin of our ideas.

of intellectual ideas and moral dispositions, is an absurdity, which nobody, I imagine, will be hardy enough to contend for. I now mean to try, whether we cannot arrive at the same conclusion by the latter method of argumentation, namely, by reasoning from causes to their effects; and as I before proved, that the investigations of reason and the doctrines of the New Testament confirm each other; I shall now endeavour to shew, that an equal degree of conformity subsists between the deductions of reason, and the historical part of the sacred writings.

To render any thing or being perfect in its kind, it is necessary, that the several parts and powers of it be proportioned to each other. Thus, in a machine, if one spring be too weak  
or

or too strong, if one wheel be too small or too great for the others ; the motion of that machine must wholly cease, or proceed in an irregular manner ; so that the intended effects of it will be either not at all, or very imperfectly produced. The observation is equally true with respect to rational and moral beings. If their mental powers be disproportioned to each other, irregularity must be the necessary consequence, without the aid of something external to preserve an equilibrium.

The creation of the irrational and rational parts of a being appear to be very different things. When the several parts of the body are put together, when the machine is put into motion, and endued with the instincts necessary to the preservation  
; of



of the individual and the species; the formation of the irrational part is completed. But the creation of the rational and moral faculties of a being must begin, when the creation of the irrational part is ended. The reason is, that in the one case, the being is merely passive; in the other it is necessarily active, and must therefore previously exist, and be endued with perception and other powers and qualities essential to action. I say, that, in the creation of the intellectual and moral part, the being itself is necessarily active; for knowledge, both speculative and practical, must be derived from experience, by observing the properties of things and the consequences of particular modes of conduct; and virtuous dispositions depend upon

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habits

habits acquired by acting upon certain principles collected from such observations. But freewill does not require the concurrence of the agent to produce it, nor is it improved by experience or habit: If a being be endued with it at all, it must receive it, together with its existence and the other natural powers of the mind, from the hands of its Creator. Now free will is implied in the very idea of a rational and moral agent, by which is meant a being, which, from a consideration of the difference of things, chuses one mode of conduct in preference to an other. Hence it appears, that a being must receive its active powers, and be endued with a freedom of will in the exercise of those powers, before it can be possessed of intellectual ideas  
and

moral dispositions to direct it in the use of them; since both those ideas and those dispositions are acquired by the free exercise of the active powers, and therefore necessarily pre-suppose their existence\*. What-  
ever

\* It would perhaps be too great presumption to decide positively on a subject of this kind; but these appear to me to be the general principles, upon which the intellectual ideas and moral dispositions of all created beings are founded; the different degrees of perfection depending, not upon the different methods, by which the knowledge and moral dispositions are acquired, but upon the superior or inferior quality of the original powers of the mind; upon a quicker or slower apprehension, and a keener or more dull penetration in discovering the nature of things and the consequences of actions; and upon the ease or difficulty, with which habits are formed, and the degree of efficacy with which they operate. But we must remember, that excellence in the former of these  
instances

ever external objects there may be, fitted to produce pleasing sensations in such a being; it is evident, that, being ignorant of the nature of things and the consequences of actions, and destitute of moral dispositions, it must consider the possession of those objects as a natural good, not only when they may be lawfully obtained, but when they may not; and as the appetites, thus unlawfully indulged, acquire strength from the indul-

instances renders error more inexcuseable, and in the latter more fatal. This consideration will enable us to say with some degree of probability, why fallen man may be redeemed, when rebellious angels are consigned to eternal perdition; since the same causes, which secure the happiness of the inhabitants of heaven, namely, the facility of acquiring habits and the powerful operation of them, have stamped an indelible character of wickedness upon the devil and his angels.



indulgence, it will of course, if left solely to the natural use of its faculties, become more and more depraved. — But cannot this be prevented by Omnipotence? Not absolutely: for Omnipotence cannot make the same being at once a necessary and a free agent. All, that appears possible, or at least most proper to be done in such a case, is to limit the sphere of its action for a time, by placing it in a state of discipline, till it has acquired intellectual ideas and moral habits; and to furnish it with powerful and obvious motives, and an easy method of obtaining information. These motives and this information may be furnished by immediate communications from the Deity, enforced by explicit and particular promises and threatenings; or by constituting

such a state of discipline, that the tendency of virtue to promote the happiness of the individual will be apparent. The former method, if adopted exclusively, would prevent the exercise of the rational powers of the being; and the latter would operate only as a remedy furnished by experience, to counteract improper elections already made, and vicious habits already acquired. It seems therefore most becoming the wisdom and goodness of the Deity to adopt the former method first, as far as is consistent with free will; and when the intellectual and moral faculties are sufficiently cultivated, to trust chiefly to them, aided and supported by general declarations of his will, enforced by as general promises and threatenings. But still the being,  
constituted

constituted a free agent, may, in either case, reject that information, and act contrary to those motives. This I conceive to be nothing but a plain description of what the first state of a rational and moral agent must necessarily be; and when we find such a being in such a situation, it is surely of itself, unsupported by other considerations, a strong argument, that the being is in the first state of its existence.

It would be impossible in a treatise of this kind to give a complete account of the nature and consequences of a transaction, that has exercised the genius of the greatest men of the christian world: I will however endeavour to give such a brief description of the Mosaical account of the fall of man, as will be

sufficient to shew its agreement with the principles of the preceding deduction.

Our first parents, void of intellectual ideas and moral propensities, could have no knowledge of good and evil; but they enjoyed the advantages of infinite wisdom in a familiar intercourse with their Creator. There was nothing required on their part, but to confide in him, and obey his directions as the best rule of conduct. The tree of knowledge of good and evil was appointed as a test of this confidence and obedience, that a violation of it might be apparent and incontrovertible. If they were satisfied, that the wisdom and goodness of God were to be depended upon in all cases; and that it was their interest, as well as their duty,



to confide in him for future blessings, who had bestowed upon them the past; they would not then seek instruction from another quarter, or endeavour to render themselves independent on their Creator. But if they should suspect, that he unjustly detained them in a state of unnecessary dependence; they had apparently the means of redress in their own power: The tree of knowledge of good and evil was in the midst of the garden, guarded only, as they would then imagine, by an interested injunction and empty threat. It was this insinuation the tempter made use of, to prevail upon the mother of mankind to transgress the divine commands: "Ye shall not surely die," says he: "for God doth know, that in the day,"  
 "ye

“ ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall  
 “ be opened; *and ye shall be as gods,*  
 “ knowing good and evil:” That  
 is, you will become independent be-  
 ings, and capable of knowing good  
 and evil by your own faculties, and  
 will no longer continue in subordina-  
 tion to him. The effect of this fal-  
 lacious representation we all know:  
 “ When the woman saw, that the  
 “ tree was good for food, and that it  
 “ was pleasant to the eyes, *and a tree*  
 “ *to be desired to make one wise;* she  
 “ took of the fruit thereof, and did  
 “ eat, and gave also to her husband  
 “ with her, and he did eat.”

This act of rebellion necessarily  
 interrupted the familiar intercourse  
 between God and man. Infinite  
 justice required, that some punish-  
 ment should be inflicted on the cri-  
 minal.

minal. According to human conception the difficulty was great. For the Deity to exterminate the human race, which he had just formed, would be to counteract his own designs, and could not therefore be consistent with divine wisdom, which foresees all things. To inflict a temporary punishment might perhaps have secured the future obedience of the immediate offenders. But the offence would be liable to be repeated without end by succeeding generations. Hence the Majesty of heaven would be exposed to universal contempt, or must be vindicated by perpetual interpositions. Another and a more effectual method was adopted by the wisdom and goodness of the Almighty; this was, to prevail upon all the generations of men to  
trust

trust in him, by convincing them from their own experience, that the idea of their self-sufficiency is an empty delusion ; and that, when deprived of the instruction and assistance of their Creator, they are exposed to inevitable misery. — Let us now consider them in their pursuit of happiness unassisted by the wisdom of God.

As a desire of private happiness is the only innate principle of man ; when he had thrown off his dependence upon God, the possession of every object, apparently suited to promote that happiness, would be desirable ; and as he had neither knowledge to direct, nor habits of virtue to check the excesses of, his natural appetites, the most obvious methods of obtaining those objects would be practised. In such circumstances



stances can we be surprized at the account of Scripture, that, in the course of a few generations, “\* the “ wickedness of man was great in “ the earth, and that every imagina- “ tion of the thoughts of his heart “ was only evil continually;” — and that “ the earth was filled with violence ?” — The signal instance of divine vengeance, inflicted upon sinners at the flood, gave a considerable check to the progress of vice; and the communications of divine wisdom imparted to Noah, co-operating with the experience of former ages, shewed the necessity of some kind of restraint upon the unruly desires of men. Hence civil societies were formed, governments established, and laws enacted. Even the wisest laws, when

\* Gen. vi. 5 — 13.

when executed by the most upright of the sons of men, will be very imperfect guardians of morality. But those laws were enacted, and those governments administered by men, whose understandings, of themselves too weak to discover an adequate rule of conduct, were farther enfeebled by the prevalence of error, and the fascination of vicious inclinations habituated to indulgence. In short, the history of every nation of the heathen world exhibits in the strongest light the feeble efforts of unassisted reason in the search of happiness. In every climate was the experiment made, from the snows of Caucasus to the burning sands of Africa; and in every possible stage of society, from the rambling tribes of Scythia to the polished states of Greece and Rome;

Rome ; yet it's boasted powers were found at last in speculation to lead to uncertainty, and in practice to sensuality. Indeed the abilities and zeal of many of the philosophers of old intitled them to the admiration and gratitude of mankind. But they were engaged in an unequal contest; and all their labours served but to shew, how little could be done by the greatest geniuses, improved by the learning of the most cultivated ages, for the advancement of the knowledge of good and evil.

\* It was at this period, that the Almighty proposed his terms of reconciliation. Those terms were, Faith, or an unbounded confidence in God, and Repentance, or an utter

\* Secker, Vol. IV. Sermon VIII.

ter detestation of the sins they had been guilty of †, and the vicious habits they had acquired by forsaking the fountain of wisdom and holiness, and delivering themselves over to their own imaginations. Hence the force of those exhortations of working out our salvation, of mortifying our ungodly lusts, which by indulgence had become a part, as it were, of ourselves, and therefore the extirpating of which is emphatically compared to cutting off a right hand, and plucking out a right eye. Hence it is, that the converts to Christianity are said to be born again, to divest them-

† I have not mentioned in these conditions faith in Jesus Christ; for that, being an acknowledgement of the commission and powers of the Mediator, must necessarily be supposed to be a preliminary article.



themselves of all the prejudices and habits they had acquired in their carnal state, and by proposing to themselves a new law of life to create in them other principles of conduct. Hence also they were required to humble themselves as little children, to depend as implicitly and submissively upon their heavenly father for spiritual instruction, as children do upon their earthly parents for information about the things of this life.

Thus it appears, that, whether we reason from effects to their causes, or from causes to their effects, we arrive at the same conclusion. As, by tracing the human mind through it's several operations, we discovered man, at his entrance into this world, without intellectual ideas and moral dispositions, and therefore evidently

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commencing his existence as a rational and moral agent; so by reasoning from the principles, upon which the intellectual ideas and moral dispositions of created beings are formed, and by considering the inevitable consequences of particular modes of conduct, we have arrived at the present state of man as a rational and moral agent: and as in the former case our investigations were confirmed by the doctrines of the New Testament; so in the latter our deductions appear to be equally conformable to the historical part of the sacred writings. I think, therefore, enough has been said to convince an unprejudiced reader, that the opinion of a pre-existent state “is *not* confirmed by reason, by all the appearances of nature, and the doctrines

"ttines of revelation;" but that they all concur in proclaiming in the plainest and most unequivocal terms, that this undoubtedly is the first state of our existence; and that the contrary opinion was an hypothesis framed by ignorance in the infancy of philosophy, to explain the cause of the existence of natural and moral evil in the creation of a Deity infinite in wisdom and goodness, which admits of a solution in a much more easy and rational manner.

I am sensible, that I have but very slightly touched upon many topics, which deserve a more minute attention; but such a method of discussing the subject would not have answered the end, I wish to accomplish in the preceding treatise. My philosophical readers (if any such should fa-

your me with their attention) had perhaps already suggested to themselves every thing, that can be said upon the subject, in a much better manner, than I could display it in; while the superficial thinker, who is in most danger of being dazzled by the wit, and imposed upon by the assertions of our author, would be deterred from perusing a work, swelled to a considerable size, and abounding in abstracted reasonings. If there be any: who wish to enter more deeply into those subjects, than they have hitherto done; they may receive the most ample assistance, by consulting the authors referred to in my notes.

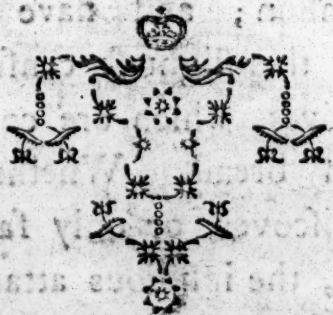
In the course of the subject I have treated our author with freedom, but I hope, with candour and good manners. “ \* *Dissentientium inter se re-*  
“ pre-

\* Cic. de Fin. Lib. I. Cap. VIII.



“prehensiones non sunt vituperandæ:  
 “maledicta, contumeliæ, tum ira-  
 “cundæ contentiones, concertatio-  
 “nesque pertinaces indignæ mihi  
 “philosophiâ videri solent.” Though  
 philosophy and religion should be de-  
 fended equally against misrepresen-  
 tation and misconception, they should  
 not be disgraced by the petulance or  
 passion of their advocates. I have  
 therefore considered his arguments,  
 which he has delivered to the pub-  
 lic, as the only proper subjects of  
 reprehension; and have carefully  
 avoided the slightest censure upon  
 his motives, which are confined to  
 his own breast. Whether others  
 really discover, or only fancy they  
 discover, the insidious attack in the  
 weak defence, has not been the ob-  
 ject of my inquiry. I saw error ob-  
 truded

truded on the public under the venerable names of reason and revelation, and have endeavoured in a single instance to vindicate them from the charge of supporting it. If I have succeeded in this attempt, my design is completely answered.



26 JUL 66

